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homemakers' chat

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U. S. DEPARTMENT
OF AGRICULTURE

FRIDAY, October 3, 1941

SUBJECT: "HOT SCHOOL LUNCHES". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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If you ever carried a dinner pail to school the news for today will probably have more than just a passing interest for you. The news is about hot lunches for school children--real nourishing noon meals prepared and served at the school house.

If you are a former dinner-pail carrier, you no doubt remember how dull those carried lunches used to get, no matter how hard your mother tried to find something new and different. For there just weren't many good things to eat that you could carry to school stone cold.

Our lunches, I remember, used to run pretty much to sandwiches, cookies, and cakes, with some fresh fruit now and then. We used to try to pep them up now and then by trading off with the neighbor kids once in awhile. But that really didn't help much. For we only got different kinds of sandwiches--cookies, and cakes, and occasional fresh fruit.

But now back to the good news I mentioned at the beginning of this broadcast.

According to advance reports, the hot school lunch is taking the place of more tin dinner pails than ever this term. Of course, there aren't figures on every school that serves lunches throughout the country. But one thing is clear. That is, the trend is upward--not down."

If you remember, it was back in the fall of 1939 that the school lunch program got one of the biggest boosts it's ever had. That year, many school lunches were able to have surplus farm foods. And millions of undernourished children had hot lunches at school--sometimes a meal that was the best they had all day.

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This year the Surplus Marketing Administration of the U. S. Department of Agriculture plans for surplus farm foods to reach around 5 million children. Almost that many more can be served, if more communities take it upon themselves to sponsor a school lunch project.

The Surplus Marketing Administration says that there's little red tape involved in getting surplus farm foods for your school lunch program, if your school is attended by children eligible for these foods. Naturally, the school lunch program has to have a reliable director and cooperating organizations who see to it that funds are provided to carry on.

But I won't go into that now. The easiest way to see about it if you are interested is to get in touch first with your local or State Department of public welfare.

And now--what makes up the lunch itself? If it's going to be really nourishing, it has to be more than just hot. It needs to provide the kind of food children can use to build their bodies--and turn into energy for play and study.

Let me pass on to you some tips on planning the school lunch from Dr. Louise Stanley, chief of the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Home Economics.

"Ideally," she says, "a school lunch is made up of one nourishing main dish, a glass or two of milk, fruit or vegetable in some form, bread and butter or a sandwich, and a simple dessert."

That's no hard and fast rule of course. For not only will your menu vary according to the food value of the main dish, but also according to the facilities you have for cooking and serving at your school.

For instance, the most ambitious school lunches are centered around a very substantial main dish with the rest of the meal of lighter foods. This might mean a main dish of meat, fish, eggs, or beans. Or it might be one of these in combination with a cereal or with vegetables. Or on cold days--what could be better than a bowlful of soup or chowder?

Here are 3 good menus on that pattern suggested by Doctor Stanley:

One is: meat loaf, served with a raw vegetable sandwich, fruit shortcake, and milk. Another is Spanish rice with salt pork, carrot sticks or other raw vegetable, bread and butter sandwich, stewed dried fruit, and milk. And the third: vegetable chowder, muffins, prune cottage pudding, and milk.

Another way to vary the menu pattern is to serve a lighter main dish, such as a salad, or cooked vegetables, or a vegetable soup. Then the rest of the meal will be more substantial. For instance, with an apple-and-cabbage salad, you might serve a peanut butter sandwich, then a dessert of creamy rice with raisins, and milk to drink to round out the meal.

But don't think that just because you haven't equipment, or space, or help enough to prepare a whole noon meal, you can't do something to improve the lunch in your school.

Maybe you can serve one substantial dish, such as a stew or a soup, to add to the lunch children carry from home. Or maybe this one hot dish would be cocoa because that takes even less equipment. But even that is a great improvement over an all-cold lunch.

And if it is absolutely impossible to have anything hot--carried lunches can often be greatly improved with a glass of milk. Or a serving of fruit. Or maybe a nutritious sandwich filling can be made up at school and put on bread that children bring with them.

Anyone who is in charge of a school lunch program, and interested in more menus and recipes is welcome to a school lunch publication that gives just such information. Recipes in this bulletin are worked out for 12, 25, and 50 servings. Title of the publication is "School Lunches Using Farm Surpluses." Directors of school lunch programs can get copies of it free by writing to the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

